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More Than Just a Post: Decoding the Journey from Authenticity to Advocacy in Social Media

Abstract

This study investigates how customer attitude mediates the relationship between social media influencer authenticity and positive word-of-mouth (WOM). A quantitative approach was adopted, informed by Social Exchange Theory (SET). A structured questionnaire was administered to 353 social media users aged 18–35 in Quetta. Analysis using SPSS and the PROCESS Macro indicates that influencer authenticity significantly shapes customer attitudes, thereby enhancing positive WOM. The findings confirm partial mediation, suggesting that authenticity not only directly influences WOM but also strengthens it through favourable attitudes. The study highlights that authenticity must translate into positive consumer perceptions to drive advocacy.

Keywords: Authenticity of Social Media Influencer, Customer Attitude, Positive Word-of-Mouth, Social Exchange Theory.

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Abstract

This study investigates how customer attitude mediates the relationship between social media influencer authenticity and positive word-of-mouth (WOM). A quantitative approach was adopted, informed by Social Exchange Theory (SET). A structured questionnaire was administered to 353 social media users aged 18–35 in Quetta. Analysis using SPSS and the PROCESS Macro indicates that influencer authenticity significantly shapes customer attitudes, thereby enhancing positive WOM. The findings confirm partial mediation, suggesting that authenticity not only directly influences WOM but also strengthens it through favourable attitudes. The study highlights that authenticity must translate into positive consumer perceptions to drive advocacy.

Keywords: [Authenticity of Social Media Influencer](#), [Customer Attitude](#), [Positive Word-of-Mouth](#), [Social Exchange Theory](#)

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Introduction

Numerous studies have shown that the qualities of social media influencers, such as trustworthiness, skills, charm, and relatability, significantly influence consumer attitudes, brand interaction, and purchase intentions (Lee & Eastin, 2021; Wilkie et al., 2022). Authenticity, in particular, has emerged as a vital quality that enhances the influence of influencer

marketing (Jun & Yi, 2020; Liu & Lee, 2024). At the same time, positive word-of-mouth (WOM) has been acknowledged as a pivotal outcome of effective influencer marketing, leading to enhanced brand loyalty and consumer gain (Rosário & Loureiro, 2021; Shafiq et al., 2023). Numerous researchers have also examined the direct connection between influencer traits and positive WOM, emphasising the influencer's



capability to simulate consumer advocacy (Zhao et al., 2024). In addition, the trustworthiness and competence of social media influencers (SMIs) substantially affect consumer perceptions and behavioural outcomes, such as positive WOM. According to Kwiatek et al. (2021), influencers with considerable domain expertise, charisma, and social respect are more likely to build trust with their audiences, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of their brand endorsements. This credibility inspires consumers to engage in positive WOM, as they consider the information to be real and reliable. In the competitive digital environment where misinformation is widespread, the perceived trustworthiness of influencers acts as a powerful accelerator in shaping positive brand-related discussions among consumers.

Furthermore, studies highlight that the interactive nature and one-sided relationships between consumers and influencers increase the likelihood of positive behavioural outcomes. Ermeç (2022) emphasises that when followers develop strong unilateral interactions with influencers, feeling a one-sided friendship or emotional bond, they tend to show a positive attitude with regard to influencers' suggestions, leading to increased purchase intentions and increased WOM promotion.

Previous studies show that authenticity and credibility are important in explaining how followers engage in word-of-mouth (WOM), yet there remains a major gap in understanding the relationship between them. Authenticity and credibility each have several components. For example, authenticity includes being original, natural, and consistent, while credibility includes being attractive, trustworthy, and knowledgeable. In today's digital era, especially within the marketing landscape, brands increasingly rely on social media influencers to shape consumers' perceptions and engagement with their products. While influencer authenticity emerges as a key determinant in capturing audience attention, the exact mechanism through which it affects consumer behaviour, such as generating positive word-of-mouth (PWOM), remains unclear. Prior studies have shown the significance of authenticity and credibility in influencer marketing, yet they often underplay the role of customer attitude in this process (Saleem, 2017; Wang & Weng, 2023). This creates a significant gap in understanding how consumers respond positively to influencers. Therefore, it's important to explore whether customer attitude acts as a bridge between an influencer's perceived authenticity and consumers' willingness to take part in spreading positive word-of-mouth. Addressing this gap will provide a deeper

understanding of how influencer marketing can be made successful. Additionally, by focusing on a university student sample, a demographic highly active on social media and responsive to influencer content (Pozharliev et al., 2022), this research contributes to understanding emerging consumer behaviours among Generation Z and Millennials.

Literature Review:

Social Media Influencer Authenticity and Customer Attitude

Authenticity refers to the idea that an influencer is genuine, transparent, and are guided by their own moral rather than being influenced by monetary gains (Lee & Eastin, 2021). In the pretext of social media, authenticity is a crucial factor because consumers rely on influencers to provide honest and personal recommendations. Influencers perceived as honest and trustworthy are the ones who are the most authentic as compared to other traditional influencers. Authenticity creates a connection between the consumer and influencer and a sense of acceptance of promoted brands. According to Lee and Eastin (2021), authenticity is multidimensional, comprising five key dimensions. Sincerity which is the perceived honesty of the influencer. Truthful Endorsements those Endorsements that resonate with the influencer's personal experiences or values. Visibility which is the influencer's openness and transparency regarding sponsorships or collaborations. Expertise is the influencer's demonstrated knowledge and skill in a relevant domain. Uniqueness is the influencer's distinct personality and original content style (Panra et al., 2024). Zhang et al. (2024) adds that visual cues such as editing of images also influences perceived authenticity. With minimal editing leading to higher perceived authenticity especially in the case of informational content. The authenticity of influencers plays an important role in building Para social relationships, trust, and brand credibility. This research is Causal in nature and aims to study the spillovers of Authenticity. Furthermore, prior studies provide a causal relationship between different variables (Jun & Yi, 2020; Gul, N. et al., 2025; Gul, N., Xiaolin, X., & Lanrong, Y. 2017; Syed, A., Gul, N., et al., 2021). Research suggests that followers of authentic influencers are more likely to engage with endorsed content, spread positive WOM, and show loyalty towards the brand endorsed (Misra et al., 2024). With the maturity of influencer marketing the authenticity has proven an important factor given the increase in paid and covert advertising (Woodroof et al., 2020). Authenticity plays a crucial role in determining the

efficiency of influencer marketing. Authentic influencers are seen as more relatable, trustworthy and sincere, which helps to build strong emotional bonds with the audience (Lee & Eastin, 2021; Zhang et al., 2024). As noted by Ermec (2022), the authenticity of influencers promotes Para social interactions, where consumers consider influencers as companions, thereby building stronger trust and loyalty. Consumers are more likely to prefer influencers who openly connect their endorsements with their personal values, and actual usage, reducing the impression of promotional bias (Jun & Yi, 2020). Moreover, findings by Nafees et al. (2021) and Shafiq et al. (2023) shows that transparency about sponsorships and authentic narratives not only boosts perceived authenticity but also increases the influencer's credibility. Slight content modification (Zhang et al., 2024) and the influencer's evidence of proficiency further enhance the audience's perception of sincerity. This perceived authenticity encourages consumers to perceive the influencer's suggestions as unbiased and honest, increasing their willingness to engage with the advertised brands and generate positive word-of-mouth (Rosário & Loureiro, 2021).

H1: The authenticity of social media influencers has a positive effect on customer attitude.

Customer Attitude and Positive Word of Mouth:

Customer attitude refers to how a customer feels towards a brand, product, or a marketing activity (Zhao et al., 2024). It includes feelings, beliefs and behavioral components (Su et al., 2023). In influencer marketing customer attitude explains how consumers perceive the influencer and the brand they are endorsing, which will eventually lead to outcomes like purchase decisions and information sharing. Customer attitude is conceptually divided into three components. Cognitive Component explains the existing beliefs and knowledge about a brand or influencer. Affective Component involves emotional reactions, such as liking or admiration. Behavioral Intention Component reflects the consumers intention to indulge in a behavior such as purchasing or recommending (Zhao et al., 2024). Attitudes can be both positive, consistent or inconsistent and their strength depends upon the source credibility or perceived relevance of the message (Wilkie et al., 2022). Customer attitude is a crucial mediator in marketing models because it explains the relationship between perception and action. Favorable attitude observed to have caused increase in loyalty, brand advocacy, and stimulate positive word-of-mouth (Su et al., 2023). In influencer marketing a positive attitude

towards the influencer or the endorsed product will eventually lead to consumers sharing their experiences with others. Which will increase the brand's reach and reputation (Rosário & Loureiro, 2021). Customer attitude acts as a bridge between marketing communication and real-world behavioral outcomes. As highlighted by Zhao et al. (2024), attitudes consist of a mixture of cognitive (beliefs), affective (feelings), and behavioral (intentions). In influencer marketing context, positive mental assessments (e.g., perceiving the influencer as competent and genuine), combined with positive emotions like admiration and trust, encourages stronger behavioral intentions to buy and recommend products (Suet al., 2023).

Additionally, Wilkie et al. (2022) suggest that the stability and intensity of customer attitudes are shaped by influencer's perceived credibility and significance of the endorsed content. Positive customer attitudes not only boost engagement but also drive downstream behaviors such as brand commitment and advocacy (Din, Qaiser Mohi Ud et al., 2025; Rosário & Loureiro, 2021). Importantly, research highlights that customer attitude functions as a critical mediator converting perceived influencer authenticity into measurable outcomes like word-of-mouth (WOM) (Kwiatek et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2024). This mediating role explains the cognitive process from influencer attributes to consumer behaviors in digital environments. Thus, the next hypothesis is formulated as:

H2: Customer attitude has a positive effect on positive word-of-mouth (WOM).

Positive Word-of-mouth (WOM) and Authenticity of Social Media Influencer

Positive word-of-mouth (WOM) indicates advantageous informal communication within consumers about a brand, product, or service (Azim & Nair, 2021). Today world is connected digitally, hence those products or services that acquire positive WOM through online and offline channels capability incredible market success (Bibi et al., 2025). In the era of digitalization, positive WOM, specifically in the shape of electronic WOM, has aroused a key factor of consumer behavior, as recommendations from peers are often perceived as more preferable than conventional advertising (Shafiq et al., 2023). WOM can be described based on dimensions like Valence is the positive, neutral, or negative nature of the conversation or interaction. Volume is the quality of WOM formed about a brand. Reach is the degree to which the WOM extends beyond networks.

Credibility is the recognized trustworthiness and knowhow of the origin (Rosário & Loureiro, 2021).

Thus, it is postulated that:

H3: The authenticity of social media influencers has a positive impact on positive word-of-mouth (WOM).

Customer attitude mediates the relationship between the authenticity of social media influencers and positive word-of-mouth (WOM)

Positive WOM generally includes consumers freely promoting a brand, inculcating positive experiences, and encouraging others to follow the product or service. Positive WOM is thoroughly vital for brands because it impacts awareness, trust, and purchase decisions without direct promotional costs (Kapoor et al., 2023). It spreads the brand's reach originally and can greatly enhance brand image. This social media sharing creates a ripple effect that expands brand perception beyond direct audiences. In addition, trust and emotional connections formed via one sided relationship substantially drive consumers' willingness to involve in word-of-mouth, especially among Gen Z and Millennials, who value peer review over traditional advertising (Zhao et al., 2024; Ermeç, 2022). Hence, promoting positive word-of-mouth is essential for sustainable brand expansion in celebrity driven markets.

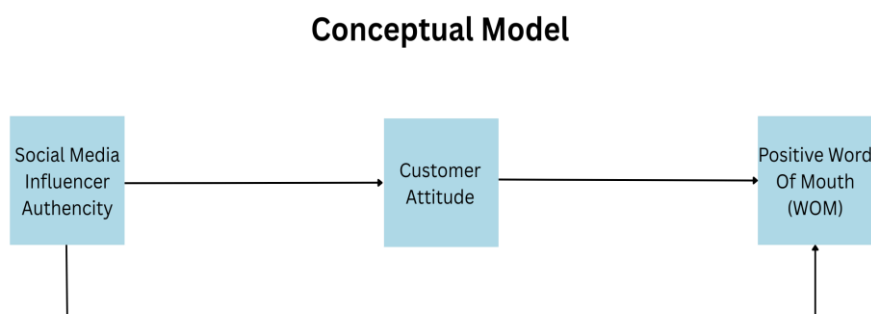
H4: Customer attitude mediates the link among the authenticity of social media influencers and positive word-of-mouth (WOM).

Theoretical Background

Social Exchange Theory (SET) was introduced by sociologist George C. Homans in the 1950s and later

advancements were introduced by scholars like Peter Blau (1964), This theory is grounded on the notion that human relationships are built upon cost benefit analysis. According to SET, when influencers display authentic traits, such as being natural, original and consistent followers perceive these traits as socially rewarding. To appear authentic to consumers the influencer should display honesty and sincerity, these traits build trust and value to the influencer follower relationship. This perceived benefit motivates consumer to remain engaged, pay the influencer back by paying attention, or promoting the influencers to others. SET suggests that when people have positive good experiences like seeing an influencer seem real and honest, they develop favorable attitudes, or feelings towards the influencer. As the followers keep having positive interactions over time, their attitude becomes stronger. This positive attitude then encourages them to spread positive wordof-mouth about the influencer or about the product or service they promote. Social Exchange Theory (SET) also explains why people spread positive word-of mouth (PWOM), when they feel they are getting something valuable in return from the influencer for example like fun content, trust, or feeling a connection then they want to return the favor. They do it by telling others about the influencer or the products endorsed by the influencer. This sharing makes followers feel good or gain approval from others. In the same manner it helps the influencer by making them more popular and trusted. In short, Social Exchange Theory explains the entire conceptual model of this research. It explains how influencer authenticity leads to the formation of a positive attitude in followers, which in turn encourages them to indulge in PWOM.

Figure 1



Methodology

Methodology is description of the research design, population, sampling methods and data collection process that was applied to collect quantitative data on the targeted audience. The tools used such as the structured questionnaire are elaborated plus the scales and statistical tools used to measure. The chapter also expounds the reliability and the validity testing procedures to make the data accurate and dependable. Imitating a clear and logical description of the research procedure, this chapter allows reproducing and evaluating the methodological rigor of the research. This investigation adopts the research onion model developed by Saunders et al. (2007) to structure and justify the methodological choices made throughout the research process. This research adopts positivist philosophy, which emphasises understanding the subjective meanings and social contexts which shape consumer behaviour. Subsequently the research explores perception of authenticity, attitude and word-of-mouth, a positivism lens allows for a nuanced understanding of how individuals construct meaning around influencer marketing experience. The selected research strategy implies a quantitative survey via a questionnaire, utilizing a cross sectional time horizon to collect data analysis at one point. The research is explanatory in nature directing to support understandings into the authenticity of social media influencers and positive word-of-mouth. This unit of analysis converges on individual customers who are active on social media. Hence this research design targets to find how authenticity of social media influencers performances an analytical role in shaping customer attitudes and generating positive word-of-mouth. A deductive approach is employed, as the study tests existing theories and proposed relationships among defined constructs: influencers authenticity, customer attitude, and positive word-of-mouth. Hypothesis will be derived from existing literature and empirically tested through quantitative methods. This research uses a quantitative method approach, leveraging structured surveys to collect numerical data on the

constructs. This allows for hypothesis testing, statistical modeling and generalizability of findings. A survey-based data will be used to collect data from those participants who are active social media users and follows influencers. Surveys will assess perceptions of influencer authenticity, attitude of customer towards influencers and word-of-mouth. A cross sectional design will be applied for data collection at one instant. This design is appropriate for measuring attitudes and perceptions in a dynamic social media environment.

The statistics for this analysis will be collected through a structured questionnaire to gather information through different social media platforms and physical paper. And to ensure the participants feel secure about their privacy, the questionnaire will begin with a statement affirming that all responses will remain anonymous. This questionnaire is designed to measure three key instructs influencer authenticity, customer attitude and positive word-of-mouth. All items will use a 5point Likert scale. Ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree, to capture the intensity of participants' agreement with various statements. Nonprobability purposive sampling (e.g., screening for social media users who have recently interacted with influencer content). Around 350 respondents ensuring statistical power for mediation analysis.

Measures (Scales)

The information collected in this study was obtained through a questionnaire. According to the proposed research, the research questionnaire will be divided into three sections. All constructs and other related items are present in the appendix. The first portion of questions that were comprised in this research were gender, age and education. The second portion of the questionnaire has 8 items were about authenticity of social media influencer which focuses on visibility, sincerity (Lee & Eastin, 2021). 7 items about customer attitude from (Ilieva et al., 2024; Nafees et al., 2020; Nafees et al., 2021) and 10 items about positive word-of-mouth from (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2021)

Table 1

	Scale	Construct	No. of Items	Authors
1	Likert Scale	Authenticity of social media influencer	8	Lee & Eastin (2021). Ilieva et al. (2024)
2	Likert Scale	Customer attitude	8	Nafees et al. (2020) Nafees et al. (2021).

3	Likert Scale	Positive word-of-mouth	10	Sweeney, J.C., Soutar, G.N., & Mazzarol, T. (2021).
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Sampling

Our target population are those active social media users between the age from (18 to 50) who follow at least one influencer. basically, from Quetta’s residents.

Data Analysis

The collected data will be subjected to hypothesis testing in order to determine how influencer authenticity, customer behavior and word-of-mouth are related with each other. To find out the result we will use software’s like SPSS (Statistical package for the social sciences) which will cover techniques like correlation, descriptive analysis, correlation and

reliability. The core aim for this research was to examine the mediating mechanism of customer attitude between social media influencer authenticity and positive word-of-mouth. To attain this objective statistical analysis containing descriptive, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis and mediation analysis were performed. Aimed at empirically evaluating the relationship and interaction between these variables to substantiate the driven hypotheses. The analysis conducted in this section come up with comprehensive understanding of how influencer authenticity influence consumer advocacy behaviors. The Respondents for the study were social media users, mostly youngsters who frequently interact with influence generated content.

Table 2

Demographics

Variable	Dimension	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percents	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	172	48.7	48.7	48.7
	Female	181	51.3	51.3	100.0
	Total	353	100.0	100.0	
Age	18-23 years	320	90.7	90.7	90.7
	24-29 years	26	7.4	7.4	98.0
	30-35 years	3	0.8	0.8	98.9
	above 35 years	4	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	353	100.0	100.0	
Educational level	Undergraduate	336	95.2	95.2	95.2
	Graduate	8	2.3	2.3	97.5
	Postgraduate	9	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	353	100.0	100.0	
	12 hours	51	14.4	14.4	14.4
	34 hours	139	39.4	39.4	53.8

Average hours spend on social media	56 hours	75	21.2	21.2	75.1
	More than 6 hours	88	24.9	24.9	100.0
	Total	353	100.0	100.0	

Reliability Assessment

In the beginning, reliability analysis was performed to examine the internal consistency of the measurement instruments precisely, the scales for influencer

authenticity, customer attitude, and positive word-of-mouth using Cronbach’s alpha. Verifying high reliability is essential for the credibility and strength of the study, as it confirms that the things within each scale are clearly measuring the same concept.

Table 3

Reliability of scales

Variable	N of items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Authenticity of Social Media Influencers	8	0.736
Customer Attitude	8	0.760
Positive Word-of-mouth	10	0.818

Firstly, the influencer authenticity scale (8 items) formed a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.736, which lies within the allowable range (0.70–0.79), showing adequate internal consistency questionnaire (Nunnally, 1967).

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis provides insights into the relationship among the variables: influencer authenticity, customer attitude, and positive word-of-mouth (WOM). Pearson Correlation coefficients were used to measure strength and direction of the relationship among the variables.

Table 4

Correlation analysis

Variables	Influencer Authenticity	Customer Attitude	Positive WOM
1. Influencer Authenticity	1		
2. Customer Attitude	0.660**	1	
3. Positive WOM	0.570**	0.735**	1

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2tailed)

A significant positive correlation (r = 0.660, p < 0.01) between influencer authenticity and customer attitude was observed, indicating a strong relationship. This suggests that as followers perceive influencers more authentic, their attitude becomes

more favorable towards them. This supports the view that authenticity is a core attribute that enhances the trust and emotional connection between influencers and their followers. Customer attitude also demonstrated a significant positive correlation (r =

0.735, $p < 0.01$) with positive WOM. This indicates that when consumers have a favorable attitude towards the influencers, they are more likely to share their experience and advocate for the influencer's endorsed content or product. Influencer's authenticity displayed a positive correlation with positive WOM ($r = 0.570$, $p < 0.01$). Even though this relationship is marginally lower than the prior correlations, this result yet indicates a convincing direct connection. It implies that the perception of authenticity does not only shape attitude but directly causes encouragement in consumers to spread positive information.

Regression Analysis

To investigate the direct and indirect relationships among the study constructs influencer authenticity, customer attitude and positive word-of-mouth a multiple linear regression and mediation analysis

through SPSS and PROCESS Macro Model 4 by Andrew Hayes. The regression analysis allowed for the evaluation of the predictive power of the independent variables and the potential mediating role of customer attitude in influencing positive word-of-mouth. $R^2 = 0.553$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.550$, indicating that approximately 55.3% variance in Positive WOM is explained by Influencer Authenticity and Customer Attitude. Regression Coefficients Influencer Authenticity significantly predicts Positive WOM ($\beta=0.154$, $p=0.002$). Customer Attitude strongly predicts Positive WOM ($\beta=0.664$, $p<0.001$).

Mediation Analysis

A mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 4 to test whether customer attitude mediates the link among influencer authenticity and positive word-of-mouth.

Table 5

Hypothesis testing

Path	Coefficient (B)	SE	T-value	p-value	95% CI (LLCI, ULCI)
a (X → M)	0.6432	0.0391	16.46	< .001	[0.5663, 0.7200]
b (M → Y)	0.6645	0.0498	13.35	< .001	[0.5666, 0.7623]
c' (X → Y)	0.1538	0.0485	3.17	.0016	[0.0585, 0.2492]
Indirect (ab)	0.4274	0.0448	—	—	[0.3453, 0.5195] (Boot CI)
Total effect (c)	0.5812	—	—	—	—

The indirect effect ($ab = 0.4274$) is statistically significant, as the 95% bootstrap CI [0.3453, 0.5195] does not include zero. This suggests that MV mediates the relationship between IDV and DV. Both the direct effect (c') and indirect effect (ab) are significant, indicating partial mediation.

Table 6

Hypothesis summary

Hypothesis	Decision
H1: Social media influencers authenticity has a positive influence on customer attitude.	Supported
H2: Customer attitude has a positive impact on positive word-of-mouth (WOM).	Supported
H3: The authenticity of social media influencers has a positive impact on positive word-of-mouth (WOM).	Supported
H4: Customer attitude mediates the connection among the authenticity of social media influencers and positive word-of-mouth (WOM).	Supported

Discussion in Light of Literature

Authenticity of social media influencers has a pointed positive influence on customer attitude. Authenticity of social media influencers has a considerable positive impact on customer attitude. The first hypothesis intended in this research assumed that the authenticity of social media influencers markedly and

positively impact customer attitudes. According to existing literature, authenticity is regarded as a foundation trait influencing consumer behavior, building stronger trust, interaction and emotional relationship with influencers (Lee & Eastin, 2021; Jun & Yi, 2020). This hypothesis is strongly supported by Zhao et al. (2024), who also emphasized influencer

authenticity as crucial in positively shaping consumer attitudes.

Customer attitude has a significant positive impact on positive word-of-mouth (WOM). According to literature, optimistic customer attitudes towards brands or influencers result in directly to increased WOM, as customers who hold supportive views are tend to share these experiences within their peer group (Rosário & Loureiro, 2021; Su et al., 2023). Outcomes from the current research strongly support this, emphasizing the critical role customer attitudes play as a key mediator in consumer advocacy behaviors, improving the efficacy of influencer marketing. Furthermore, this study contributes by explaining that customer attitudes are influenced by a range of factors, including perceived trustworthiness, emotional connections, and overall satisfaction with influencer generated content. Marketers can thus enhance WOM by actively developing positive attitudes through purposeful and significant engagement strategies.

The authenticity of social media influencers has a Significant positive impact on positive word-of-mouth (WOM). The third hypothesis stated that influencer authenticity positively impacts positive WOM. Literature continuously supports that authentic influencer effectively promote trust and strong connection with their followers, resulting in enhanced consumer advocacy behaviors (Wilkie et al., 2022; Misra et al., 2024). The results from the existing study verify this hypothesis, providing additional proof that influencer authenticity not only impacts customer attitudes but directly inspire consumers to engage in positive WOM. Moreover, authentic influencers who sincerely match their personal values with endorsed products produce greater significance and perceived sincerity among consumers, thereby motivating followers to consciously support and advocate these influencers and their endorsements within their networks. Furthermore, this study proposed that customer attitudes mediate the relationship between influencer authenticity and positive WOM. Prior studies (Kwiatek et al., 2021; Ermeç, 2022) highlighted similar mediating roles, though not directly testing customer attitudes as a mediator between authenticity and WOM. Likewise, the current research increases the knowledge of what is going on in the mind of influencer marketing. As it determines that authenticity and attitudes are overlapping features, it brings out how psychological perceived influences and cognitive assessments toward influencers authenticity manifest behaviorally into WOM. The given insight is especially pertinent due to growing distrust in conventional advertising methods because

this factor further supports the authenticity of influencers as a crucial strategic consideration in contemporary digital advertising. The other contribution that this study brings about is the multidimensional nature of how customer attitudes are examined in it. Since it involves assessing attitudes in terms of cognitive, emotional and behavioral perspectives, this paper offers an end-to-end approach of understanding how the various elements of attitudes combined together through their deliberation on consumer behavior. This multipronged strategy enables marketers to design more efficient influencer campaigns by working on very precise cognitive or emotional triggers that will be used to generate positive consumer attitudes and subsequent consumer advocacy.

Customer Attitude Mediates the Relationship Between the Authenticity of Social Media Influencers and Positive Word-of-mouth (WOM). The Conclusion of the research proves that customer attitude is a significant mediator of the connection among influencer authenticity and positive word-of-mouth (WOM), and, indeed, this factor proves hypothesis number four (H4). The mediation analysis found that, although the authenticity of the influencer has a direct impact on positive WOM, a significant percentage of that impact is indirectly influencing it through customer attitude. This shows that the only thing that can make advocacy behaviors are authenticity, but when it is effective in developing positive emotional and cognitive assessment of consumers, the impact is amplified. This finding is much in line with the social exchange theory (SET) which indicates that people will enter into social interactions where they see valuable rewards in the interactions. When followers perceive influencers as genuine, open and consistent, they become emotionally satisfied, trusting, and psychologically advantaged, which further enhances the positive attitudes. Such positive attitudes encourage reciprocity, including sharing positive WOM, as a form of reciprocating appreciation of the perceived authenticity (Blau, 1964; Lee and Eastin, 2021). The present observation is also similar to previous studies. As an example, Kwiatek et al. (2021) and Ermeç (2022) have shown that the credibility and authenticity of influencers increase followers' trust, which Consequently results in behavioral intentions, including purchase intentions or word-of-mouth intentions. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2024) have found that the influencer attributes, namely, credibility, attractiveness, and interaction, influence behavioral intentions mainly via the formation of attitudes. The current research builds on these findings and empirically confirms the role of attitude as a psychological mediator, where authenticity is

changed to consumer advocacy behavior. The outcome of the partial mediation indicates that authenticity has indirect and direct impact on positive WOM via customer attitudes. Although the authenticity may encourage consumers to market the influencers and the products that the influencers endorsed, its power is enhanced when the consumers adopt a strong positive attitude. This mindset represents a reasonable trust as well as emotional attachment and transfers authenticity into long term behavioral consequences including WOM and brand advocacy. The managerial perspective of this mediation effect is that marketers have a moral responsibility to make sure that besides influencers and their authenticity, they also strategically develop positive consumer attitudes. Relatable storytelling, authentic endorsements, and open relationships can evolve genuineness into lifelong promotions.

To conclude, the H4 acceptance pays to the current body of information about the role of authenticity in influencer marketing by supporting the hypotheses that the effect of authenticity in WOM takes place via the two mechanisms of the direct influence and the attitudinal mediation. Moreover, this focuses the fact that authenticity is not a personality trait, but rather a process of relationship which creates trust, emotions, and ultimately, positive word-of-mouth transmission in digital communities.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Its reliance on quantitative surveys restricts deeper understanding of participants' subjective experiences, while qualitative methods could better capture. The sample, limited to young social media users in Quetta, constrains generalizability across regions and demographics. Only customer attitude was examined as a mediator, while other factors such as credibility or brand trust were not considered. The cross-sectional design also limits causal inference. In addition, self-reported data may involve response bias, and the use of purposive sampling reduces representativeness. Future research should adopt diverse methods, probability sampling, and longitudinal designs to enhance validity and broader applicability.

Practical Implications

This research study recommends several practical implications for marketers utilizing influencer strategies. Firms should prioritize influencer authenticity by genuine storytelling and emphasizing apparent communication to foster emotional connections and positive consumer attitudes. Careful

influencer selection, based on alignment of values and credible engagement, can boost trust and advocacy. Furthermore, leveraging consumer insights to identify effective content and influencer traits enables continuous campaign refinement. The findings also suggest collaborating with micro-influencers, who often maintain stronger audience relationships and higher engagement, thus improving perceived authenticity and accelerating more impactful word-of-mouth within targeted societies.

Theoretical Implications

This study influences to theory by validating the mediating role of customer attitude in the authenticity and WOM relationship, addressing a gap where previous research measured these variables separately. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, it describes how perceived authenticity advances favorable attitudes and advocacy. The result as well as findings extend attitude formation in digital and parasocial contexts, showing that qualities such as relatability shape consumer responses and sincerity. Thus, the study recommends a refined framework for understanding trust, influence, and behavioral outcomes in growing digital marketing situations.

Future Recommendations

Future research should stretch beyond quantitative designs by integrating qualitative methods such as focus groups or interviews to capture meaningful consumer insights. Increasing samples across diverse demographics and regions would enhance generalizability. Further studies may incorporate additional moderators or mediators, such as brand loyalty or credibility, to better rationalize engagement changing aspects. Longitudinal methods are also suggested to assess changes over time. Furthermore, examining cross-cultural differences and platform-specific features could offer more sophisticated and contextually significant understanding of influencer effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study emphasises the critical role of influencer authenticity in shaping customer attitudes and advancing positive word-of-mouth. The findings highlight that authenticity, when translated into favorable perceptions, drives meaningful consumer advocacy. It further stresses the growing consequence of transparent and ethical influencer practices in building trust, offering valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners in understanding evolving digital consumer behavior.

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